



IS INDIA ABLE TO PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES WITH THE LIMITED REOSURCES AVAILABLE?

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ABSTRACT

Resource diversion has impacted the production of Indian International Relations Theories (IRT) massively and has led to basically absence of Indian IRTs. Even with the extremely limited resources available and the field of theory building being marginalized, work has been in progress for the production of Indian IRTs by the academia. The limited resources are being diverted towards policy-oriented research, leaving the theory building academia surviving on whatever they are receiving. Most of the theories in IR are western centric, which do not fit well in the Indian context. Hence, there is a need to facilitate the production of Indian IRTs, so that Indian issues can be solved in a much better way and India's standing in the international arena is enhanced significantly. As for methodology, qualitative secondary data sources are used for the study. Homegrown theorization is used to categorize the Indian IRTs discussed in the study. Multiple academic writings have been observed and analyzed and conclusions have been drawn.

KEYWORDS: Indian International Relations Theories (IRT), Policy-oriented Research, Homegrown Theorizing, Resources

INTRODUCTION

International Relations has been, for the past two decades, criticized for being West-centric. Scholars like Acharya and Buzan have pointed out the lack or “absence of Non-West International Relations Theories” (Acharya-Buzan, 2007). This fact is true for India as well, as there has been a lack of Indian International Relations Theories (IRT). Most scholars accuse the hegemony of the Western thoughts and ideals for this absence, but there is another, more indigenous reason for this too. This lack of Indian IRT can be attributed to the diversion of the 'limited' resources available towards policy-oriented research by the state. This has become a huge problem and has led to the lack or minimum development in the production of Indian IRT. But it will be wrong to say that there has been no development at all. Some form of theory production has undertaken in the Indian IR academia, even with the limited resources being diverted towards policy research. In this paper, I am going to discuss the reasons behind the resources being diverted towards policy-oriented research. I will also try to observe whether there has been any production of Indian IRT with the help of Homegrown Theorizing as the lens to identify those theories, despite the lack of resources.

Aim of the study is to access the resources available for research which are being diverted for policy-oriented research which creates a lack for them in the production of Indian IRTs, and to check whether there has been any work done in the field of Indian IRT with minimum level of resource available.

Scope- the study takes into account only a handful of Indian IRTs and does not delve into the creation of policies and policy-oriented research in detail.

Are There Enough Resources for Research in India?

In India, attempts at creating centers for research in International Relations were taking place since before Independence. In 1943, the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) was created to counter the views of the British Chatham House. Post-Independence, in 1955, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru created the International School of International Relations

(ISIS). Then in 1965, Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA) – funded by the Ministry of Defense – was founded in the same building as the ICWA and the ISIS (Subramanyam, 2005). Later, ISIS became School of International Studies (SIS) and became a part of Jawaharlal Nehru University (Alejandro, 2017).

Acharya and Buzan has stated that there has been inadequacy in the resources present for theoretical research in Non-western countries in particular. Lack of resources for proper research has led to a culture which does not prioritize theoretical research in the non-West as compared to the West where the scholars must work on theory for career building and promotions (Acharya and Buzan, 2007).

It is not incorrect to state that there has been lack of resources for research purposes in India, but there can be found a great divide between resources for policy-oriented research and resources for theoretical research. The limited resources that are available for research are diverted towards policy-oriented research. In her article, Audrey Alejandro discusses various reasons provided by multiple Indian scholars for this event. One of the main reasons for the tilt towards policy is that most of the IR institutes are present in the national capital of New Delhi which has led to a 'Delhi-centrism' of the discipline (Mallavarapu, 2005). The concentration of the IR institutes, think tanks, etc., facilitates the researchers to be better acquainted with the political arena, and offers an exposure considered essential by the researchers working on national policies (Alejandro, 2017).

Another reason for the marginalization of theory research is that, post-independence, scholars were uncritical of the government and their policies because the new state needed to gain legitimacy both at national and international levels. Nehru also exerted as an expert in the international issue, which intervened in the production of non-governmental discourses, away from governmental views (Alejandro, 2017). This also made the academics unable to criticize the doctrines of non-alignment and non-violence in the fear of appearing to be non-patriotic. (Alejandro, 2017). For Kanti Bajpai, this mentality led

independence take a form of parochialism in academia (Bajpai, 2009). And as a result, it was at this time that 'policy-relevant' or 'policy-oriented' approach started becoming popular in India (Mohan, 2009).

Alejandro discusses another reason for preference of policy over theoretical research. In India, in the early years after independence, theoretical works were considered as 'anti-national' and 'inappropriate for a developing country, a diversion of the best and brightest from problem-solving into abstruse and speculative endeavor' (Bajpai, 2005). Theory was, at that time, considered a 'product of the West', a 'neo-colonial trap' which was not significant to address national issues (Bajpai, 2005). Therefore, refusing to use theory meant that India was distancing from the West, was being self-sufficient and autarkic (Bajpai, 2005).

At present, institutions like University Grants Commission (UGC) support the establishment and development of area studies centers which will work more on bilateral issues. In the last 40 years, both the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and UGC have preferred the funding of area studies over other sub-fields of IR (Behera, 2007). The PhDs from SIS from 1996 to 2007, more than half are related to area studies (Sharma, 2009).

The institutions and organizations of IR in India, both in terms of content and of modes of publication, favors policy-oriented work (Alejandro, 2017). Policy research is seen as a necessary field of work which will assist the government in dealing with other countries, hence, it is given utmost priority. Therefore, the limited resources which are available for research is diverted towards working for policy development. But, despite these obstacles, Indian IR scholarship has been producing IR theories which have helped understand aspects of India's approach to foreign relations and also has helped in explaining the Indian issues and situations properly, which the Western theories have failed to do.

Indian International Relations Theory

One must have thought that India, a country with such big international aspirations must have substantial theories to help the country reach its ambition. It cannot be far from the truth. Theory production in India is far from producing a coherent theory. This minimum growth can be attributed to the lack of government funding, infrastructure, lack of resources, diversion of the limited resources to policy-oriented research and the will of the society in general. The gatekeeping practice of the West does not help with the moral of the scholars who actually are trying to produce an Indian IRT. Highlighting the role of 'disciplinary gate-keeping practices', Tickner notes that:

IR reinforces analytical categories and research programs that are systematically defined by academic communities within the core, and that determine what can be said, how it can be said, and whether or not what is said constitutes a pertinent or important contribution to knowledge. (2003: 297, 300; Aydinli and Matthews 2000)

India, as stated above is anyways not a theory-friendly country. But the small amount of theory that is being produced in the country have to face discriminatory practices from the West. Navnita Chadha Behera in her article "Reimagining IR in India" (2007), has provided a few illustrations as how gatekeeping has stopped Indian ideas from gaining mainstream importance. She discusses the idea of non-Alignment and how it created a

coalition of more than 100 states from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Arab world, Latin America and the Caribbean that supported the decolonization process, literally changing the world's geopolitical landscape (Behera, 2007). But despite offering an alternative world view of how the global state system should actually function which will benefit all the states, non-alignment was never conferred the status as a 'systemic' IR theory because it did not suit the interest of the powers (Behera, 2007). Similarly, the concepts of *panchsheel* and *mandala theory* too were not given any recognition. Indian scholars who are a part of the Western epistemic community and are based in US or European universities are the only ones able to publish their articles in well-known journals published and distributed by the Western publishers.

Homegrown Theorizing

For theories to make themselves into the Western world, they need to be made. And at present, the level of theory production in India, in particular and the periphery in general is not at par with the western scholars. But there is a general agreement on the need and ongoing efforts to enrich IRT with peripheral voices. The present IRTs are not relevant and do not fit properly with the countries in the periphery. Hence, the increasing irrelevance of IRT needs to be addressed by a new form of theorizing, one which effectively blends peripheral outlooks with theory production. This form of theorizing is called "homegrown theorizing" i.e., original theorizing in the periphery about the periphery (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

Homegrown theories can be distinguished from mainstream theories by the point of their origin, from a geo-cultural standpoint, whether this be at the stage of concept formation or at the stage of inference. However, this standpoint marks the background of the ideas, not the theorists: national conceptualizations of IR are not the same as indigenous conceptualizations of IR. The national identity of a group of closely collaborating non-Western scholars, or research by non-Westerners, is sometimes related to, but not the same as the identity of the "theory" (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

There are basically two places to look for a theory's "homegrownness": the concepts can be homegrown, if they were specifically built by relying on a geo-culturally specific standpoint (whether it be a culture, civilization, religion, customs, or traditions); and/or the theory can be inferentially homegrown, if the data used in the inference come from observation of geo-culturally specific phenomena, provided that such data are used for building or altering theories, not for testing them (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

From these distinctions, there emerged three groups of homegrown theories:

1. Referential Homegrown Theories
2. Alternative Homegrown Theories
3. Authentic Homegrown Theories

• Referential Homegrown Theories

Here, the homegrown scholar's ideas or concepts of an indigenous culture, religion, civilization, etc., are used as point of reference to draw inferences about observed phenomena. Few examples are Kautilya, Xun Zi and Ibn Khaldun, or cultures such as Hinduism, Confucianism or Islam (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

• Alternative Homegrown Theories

In this way of theorizing, theories are built by remodeling the mainstream theories based on the evidence from indigenous

experiences. It is done through two ways: either altered definitions for mainstream concepts are suggested or they are employed in a different level of analysis (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

- **Authentic Homegrown Theorizing**

Authentic homegrown theorizing focuses on newly collected data, the scholars observe them. A large magnitude of data is collected as there are no reference to either homegrown ideas or mainstream theories. They are not redefined or refined forms of indigenous concepts, the fact that makes them homegrown is the origin of the data while making inferences. Hence, authentic homegrown theories are not conceptually, but inferentially homegrown (Aydinli and Biltekin, 2018).

I will be using homegrown theorizing as a way to identify and categorize the Indian IRTs which have been developed despite the marginalization they faced in front of policy-oriented research.

Indian International Relations Theories And Homegrown Theorizing

According to Aydinli and Biltekin, there have been at least three homegrown theorists who have produced Indian referential homegrown theories. They are Kanti Bajpai, Roger Boesche and Rashed Uz Zaman. Kanti Bajpai in his article *"Indian Conception of Order and Justice: Nehruvian, Gandhian, Hindutva and Neo-Liberal"* (2003), has discussed the western concepts of order and justice and tried to see how each of the Indian thinkers/culture look at them. He discussed each of the conception in details, starting with Nehruvian. According to Bajpai, Nehruvian concept followed the Westphalian state system but also demanded international collaboration in regulating the global economy and reducing economic inequality. They chose to work within the UN to foster a North-South 'dialogue'; not destruction or disengagement but dialogue with the center of global capitalism within the apex institution of international society. Hence, according to Bajpai, the Nehruvian accepted the claims of order over justice (Bajpai, 2003).

While discussing Gandhian thought, Bajpai stated that Gandhians challenge the Westphalia by wanting to replace it with an international order built on states and the regulated use of violence with a world order comprising relations among individuals, groups, communities and states based on non-violence and economic equality. The rights and responsibilities of the individual must be balanced against the rights and responsibilities of collectivities. Therefore, Gandhians, in Bull's terms, favor the claims of individual and cosmopolitan justice over international order (Bajpai, 2003). According to Bajpai, Hindutva favors a Hindu notion of cosmopolitan justice in which humanity's desire for harmony must be upheld against the rights of individuals and states to pursue their own selfish interests. The neo-liberal globalists in India, supporter of the Westphalian order, see no irresolvable contradiction between rules and institutions of Westphalian order and various alternative systems of rules and institutions (Bajpai, 2003).

While Kanti Bajpai was referencing to the contemporary, nationalist Indian thinkers, Boesche and Zaman discussed Kautilya and Arthashastra. Boesche in his book *"The First Great Political Realist: Kautilya and His Arthashastra"* (2002) and Zaman in his article *"Kautilya: The Indian Strategic Thinker and Indian Strategic Culture"* (2006), discussed Kautilya's principles and views on state and politics in details. They have discussed Kautilya's both Saptanga Theory and Mandala Theory, which have been the main conceptions for formation of

state and the relation of a state with its neighbors. Mandala Theory is the theory via which Kautilya has explained the strategy and foreign policy formation in dealing with the states' enemies and friends. Boesche in his book has discussed in details about realism in IR. He has talked about Machiavelli and the aspects that makes Machiavelli a realist thinker. He draws contrast with Plato as an idealist. And then he discusses in details about Kautilya, comparing him with other realist thinkers like Thucydides, Machiavelli and Sun Tzu. Further he goes on to discuss foreign policy, especially the war and policies for the neighbors (Boesche, 2002). While discussing about Kautilya's preference for guerrilla warfare and his special style of warfare, the "kutayudh", Boesche comparing Machiavelli to Kautilya states:

"Machiavelli-who offers no systematic discussion of even guerrilla warfare-would have been easily outmatched by generals reading either Sun Tzu or Kautilya" (Boesche, 2003).

While Boesche was interested in comparing and drawing parallels between Kautilya and western thinkers, Zaman was focusing on the influence of Kautilya's thought on realpolitik. He looks at how Kautilya's thinking has manifested in the policies of India, who is in the way of becoming a key player in the international politics. He discusses in detail the mandala theory and the concept of vijigishu. He also discusses the universality of the concepts of matsya-nyaya and how its traces can be seen throughout European history. He calls for invoking Kautilya while forming policies as much of Kautilya's principles and thoughts are still relevant (Zaman, 2006).

These are all referential homegrown theories. They have tried to explain and bring into light the Indian views and ideas born from Indian thinkers. With Homegrown Theorizing gaining a foothold in India, it is expected to bring more theories from Indian scholars as now they will have an audience with similar views and conceptions to write for.

New Theories

Indian academics have been persistent in their journey for creating a theoretical framework for Indian IRT, despite the bare minimum resources and non-existent encouragement they are provided with. Due to an absence of proper Indian authentic homegrown theories, Indian phenomena in the international arena are always viewed through the lens of Western theories. Due to this reason, it becomes difficult to explain few occurrences, sometimes India 'falls short' of the Western standards and hence we are deemed to be undeveloped and to some extent primitive.

The colonization by the British brought a completely new education and knowledge system to India, and people started getting educated under the western norms and values. Slowly and steadily, the Indian principles and knowledge system was eradicated and with it the Indian teachings. The government has been negligent in this matter as they are always concerned with formation of policies so that India can become a top collaborator for other countries and be relevant in the multipolar world. The bilateral and multilateral relations can only be formed with the proper understanding of the current needs and this is why policy-oriented research is paid great attention. Therefore, theory is put into the backtracks and no attempts were made to recover the ancient Indian teachings.

This never sat right with the IR academia in India as they could see the blatant flaws in the Western IR theories, especially

Realism and Liberalism. Despite government's ignorance, the academia went on to address this issue and have come up with remarkable and enlightening criticisms of the mainstream theories and have successfully provided the field with much needed Indian perspectives.

Such a theory is given by Navnita Behera in her article *"Provincializing International Relations through the readings of dharma"*, which she has co-authored with Giorgio Shani. Here, they have come up with the concept of providing an alternate cosmology to IR through the understanding of dharma. According to them, the Western IR and its components are circulated as secular concepts, but in reality, they are laden with Judeo-Christian ideals. They have tried to provincialize IR by providing dharmic understandings to the notions of time, self/other, order and sovereign state. They have done this through drawing out the concept of dharma from the reading of The Mahabharata and explain the four notions, hence, providing an Indian relational cosmology to IR. Their aim was not to bid one cosmology against the other, but rather to provide another alternative way of looking and understanding IR so that the discipline can become more inclusive, drop its Eurocentric, Judeo-Christian nature and become a discipline which can fit well into the non-Western world properly (Shani and Behera, 2021).

While Behera and Shani are talking about the dharmic cosmology, Deepshikha Shahi has invoked the principles of advaitic monism in her article *"Rethinking the absence of post-Western International Relations theory in India: 'Advaitic monism' as an alternative epistemological resource"* with Gennaro Ascione. Advaitic monism believes in the reality to be monist, that the reality at the core of the Being is the 'Brahman'- a 'single hidden connectedness' (Shahi and Ascione, 2016). They also compare advaitic monism with Chinese concept of Tianxia where the world is considered to be under one heaven. But Shahi differs between Tianxia and advaitic monism by calling Tianxia holist in nature in comparison to the monist nature of advaitic monism. According to Shahi, the Western world and theories working in the purview of dualism, treats the state as the primary unit of analysis where the nation-states are prime factor in guiding international relations. But, advaitic monism sees the world as an 'already-connected single reality', where the states and the world have equal ontological status and it is a politically motivated choice regarding which is to be chosen as the unit of analysis (Shahi and Ascione, 2016). According to Shahi, advaitic monism is an 'untapped resource' for theorizing in post-Western IR and must be invoked and use, especially in the Indian context as it will help to understand the Indian perspective much better than the positivist theories of Europe and United States.

Moving a little further from the Indian ancient teachings, Deepshikha Shahi also has worked to bring alternative perspectives into the field of IR to make it more global. Her work on Sufism as an alternate medium for understanding IR has been significant. In the book *"Sufism- A Theoretical Intervention in Global International Relations"*, which she edited, she has presented Sufism as a non-derivative and non-exceptionalist Global IR theory. This is based on the epistemological monism, ontological immaterialism and methodological eclecticism ingrained in the generalities of Sufi philosophy. She primarily represents and explains these through the medieval Sufi poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi's poetry. According to her, Sufism in Global IR will provide a perspective where "the oneness of the world as a political entity remains hidden" (Shahi, 2020). Through ontological immaterialism the exteriors Eurocentric IR could be steered by "ideationally blending the visible, plural, separated and often clashing strands of otherwise

connected reality into an unknown melting point of nothingness" and methodological eclecticism enables the "curious assortment of rationalism, reflectivism and extra-rationalism, thereby permitting an alternative narrative of the superficially known practice of global politics" (Shahi, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The Indian IRT, as it has been observed in the above sections, has not developed in comparison to the West. The immoral gatekeeping practices of the Western scholarship does not help matters either. But with the coming of the Homegrown Theorizing, the scholars of the peripheral countries co-operate and build an epistemic community of their own which will build theories for the periphery. These theories because are made in the periphery, with the geo-cultural inference point being the periphery, will help in understanding the phenomena taking place in here. India should think in the lines of Homegrown Theorizing if it wants its voice to be heard.

If the scholars of Homegrown Theorizing collectively refuse to succumb to the Western IRT and start developing their own tools, the West will have to give them a chance to put their voices out. Many scholars believe that a theory must be cited by the mainstream scholars and in the journals for it to get legitimacy. But in my opinion, the western citations or lack of them, should not affect the theory building of the non-west and the periphery countries. The power of legitimization of a theory must be brought from the West to the periphery because the West, no matter how much a theory is good, until and unless it will serve their interest, they will never put their stamp of approval.

The aim should not be to ignore and reject the West, or to prove ourselves be better, but to provide people with a more broadened and inclusive IR which will be open to all sorts of ideas and conceptions and to the people and the countries to connect and cooperate in a better and peaceful way.

But these can only be possible if the resources are made available to the theory builders on the country. Foreign policies can be drawn out based on these theories and they will provide a better ground for the country to stand on in front of the Western powers. If proper tools and opportunities are provided to the theorists, they will be able to provide the government with extraordinary theoretical framework which will represent Indian views in a much clear and spectacular ways.

Despite the lack of resources, the scholars and academics have been able to produce thought-provoking theories which are Indian in origin, and which have challenged the Western IRTs. One can only imagine the work that the scholars will be able to do and the theories that they will be able to provide when better resources are provided to them.

Government institutes like the UGC should equally help in promoting and developing theory building as it will motivate the upcoming generation of scholars to opt of theory development. They can take a page from the Western countries and make theoretical work necessary in academic level for promotions as it will not only provide incentive for theory building in the country but will also improve the field as multiple points of input will be there. It will help in creating relevant and better theories which will suit India and will help tremendously in building policies for the country.

The think tanks should also encourage theory building as it is an amalgamation of both theory and policies, which will enhance and help the think tanks to live up to their names. Policies are

necessary, but theoretical framework of Indian origin will provide the policies a firm ground to stand on and deal with the Western counterparts.

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Hence, to make Indian relations with other countries better and to enhance India's standing in the international arena better, resources are necessary to be provided for theory building as much as they are provided for policy-oriented research.

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